

Hope

a sermon preached on the

3rd Sunday of Advent

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at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

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Lection: Luke 3: 7-18

The Advent readings glitter with bright promises – promises of the wonderful things that would accompany the coming of Christ. Mountains would be levelled out, winding roads made straight, the desert would bloom, the poor would see justice done, the weak would no longer be exploited, war would be banished from the face of the earth.

Over 2000 years ago, God came to us in human form through the birth of Christ, whose earthly mission of salvation, peace, love and healing ended with his death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. We might well ask: What has become of all the great promises? Were they mirages? Famine still exists in many countries. The marginalised are still exploited, and world wide peace is still an elusive dream.

The Bible shows us that God's people are led forward by promises. Promises play a large part in our lives. A promise gives us hope. It motivates and energises us. It gives us something to strive for.

Advent, with its promises of a new world, takes us on a trip to a place called hope. If we, and all things in the world were perfect, hope would not be needed. Hope is required because we live in an imperfect world. We spend a great part of our lives, hoping, waiting for one thing or another.

It is impossible to live without hope. Hope is as important for our spirit, as food is for our body. Hope does not mean sitting back waiting for things to happen. It spurs us into action. It is because we have hope that we work to achieve something. We believe our efforts are worthwhile, and that they do make a difference.

Cynicism is the enemy of hope. Many people refuse to hope. They say, "Things will never change. It's no good. Why bother". Cynicism requires nothing from us. No trust – no effort – no love.

Hope is different from optimism. Optimism is the expectation that the situation will get better no matter what. Hope is the trust that God will fulfil the promises, in God's way in God's time. The person of hope lives in the present moment, with the knowledge and trust that all of life is in God's hands.

What the world needs is for us to change our attitudes. Hence the reverence for us of John's call to repentance. To repent by changing our understanding of what is important in life, and to change our lives accordingly. Changed people will bring about a changed world.

It is ourselves who suffer when we blame, judge, condemn and refuse to repent, and when we refuse to forgive.

Apart from our own personal repentance and salvation, we are called to transform humanity into God's family through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a work of justice and peace making and liberation of all people.

As Christians, let us commit to the risk of deep sharing and surrendering to God and each other in trusting love. As Christians we must be ready to change. The call is to be challenged to build relationships across previously conditioned boundaries of age, gender, class, race, religion and nationality.

The divine energy within us, both as individual and as a community, is urging us forward as a people of hope and vision. We are called to leadership through our baptism. That leadership which is love in action.

When you lead by loving, your every gesture, word and decision will help to create a new world.

It is our task to keep hope alive, and to set an example. However, we must not depend on results and progress charts. It is better to focus on the rightness and truth of the work itself; and thank God for the blessings in the past, and pray for guidance for what we must yet achieve.

When all is said and done, this world will never fulfil our deepest hopes. Only God can do that. Meanwhile we live in a place called hope, which enables us to keep one foot in the world as it is, and the other in the world as it should be

Amen.

References: Luke 3: 7-18
F. McCarthy
D.J. O'Leary

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